

“(7) Repairing, altering, improving, or providing facilities in the medical facilities and homes under the jurisdiction of the Department, not otherwise provided for, either by contract or by the hire of temporary employees and purchase of materials.

“(8) Uniforms or uniform allowances, as authorized by sections 5901 and 5902 of title 5.

“(9) Aid to State homes, as authorized by section 1741 of this title.

“(10) Administrative and legal expenses of the Department for collecting and recovering amounts owed the Department as authorized under chapter 17 of this title and Public Law 87-693, popularly known as the Federal Medical Care Recovery Act (42 U.S.C. 2651 et seq.).

“(e) MEDICAL ADMINISTRATION AND MISCELLANEOUS OPERATING EXPENSES.—Funds appropriated for Medical Administration and Miscellaneous Operating Expenses are available for the following purposes:

“(1) The administration of medical, hospital, nursing home, domiciliary, construction, supply, and research activities authorized by law.

“(2) Administrative expenses in support of planning, design, project management, architectural work, engineering, real property acquisition and disposition, construction, and renovation of any facility under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department, including site acquisition.

“(3) Engineering and architectural activities not charged to project costs.

“(4) Research and development in building construction technology.

“(f) GENERAL OPERATING EXPENSES.—Funds appropriated for General Operating Expenses are available for the following purposes:

“(1) Uniforms or allowances therefor.

“(2) Hire of passenger motor vehicles.

“(3) Reimbursement of the General Services Administration for security guard services.

“(4) Reimbursement of the Department of Defense for the cost of overseas employee mail.

“(5) Administration of the Service Members Occupational Conversion and Training Act of 1992 (10 U.S.C. 1143 note).

“(g) CONSTRUCTION.—Funds appropriated for Construction, Major Projects, and for Construction, Minor Projects, are available, with respect to a project, for the following purposes:

“(1) Planning.

“(2) Architectural and engineering services.

“(3) Maintenance or guarantee period services costs associated with equipment guarantees provided under the project.

“(4) Services of claims analysts.

“(5) Offsite utility and storm drainage system construction costs.

“(6) Site acquisition.

“(h) CONSTRUCTION, MINOR PROJECTS.—In addition to the purposes specified in subsection (g), funds appropriated for Construction, Minor Projects, are available for—

“(1) repairs to any of the nonmedical facilities under the jurisdiction or for the use of the Department which are necessary because of loss or damage caused by a natural disaster or catastrophe; and

“(2) temporary measures necessary to prevent or to minimize further loss by such causes.”.

(b) DEFINITION.—(1) Chapter 1 is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

“§ 117. Definition of cost of direct and guaranteed loans

“For the purpose of any provision of law appropriating funds to the Department for the cost of direct or guaranteed loans, the cost of any such loan, including the cost of

modifying any such loan, shall be as defined in section 502 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 (2 U.S.C. 661a).”.

(2) The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

“117. Definition of cost of direct and guaranteed loans.”.

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Subsections (c) through (h) of section 313 of title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), and section 117 of such title, as added by subsection (b), shall take effect with respect to funds appropriated for fiscal year 2003.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH).

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, as chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am very pleased to bring before the House H.R. 2540, as amended, Veterans Benefits Act of 2001.

This is the fourth major piece of legislation that the Committee on Veterans' Affairs has brought to the floor this year. Earlier this year, the House passed H.R. 801, the Veterans' Survivor Benefits Improvements Act of 2001, which was signed into law on June 5.

This legislation, Public Law 107-14, expands health and life insurance coverage for dependents and survivors of veterans. The House also approved H.R. 811, the Veterans' Hospitals Emergency Repair Act, which provides \$550 million over 2 years to repair and renovate VA medical facilities.

While this legislation is still awaiting action in the Senate, having passed the House, funding was included in the VA-HUD appropriations bill approved last night to begin these needed repairs.

In addition, the House has approved H.R. 1291, the 21st Century Montgomery G.I. Bill Enhancement Act, which also is awaiting Senate action. It provides a 70 percent increase in G.I. educational benefits to qualifying service members.

Mr. Speaker, today we bring yet another vitally important piece of legislation to the floor that will provide increases in VA compensation payments to disabled veterans and their survivors.

Mr. Speaker, there are more than 2.3 million disabled veterans or survivors of disabled veterans today receiving compensation who will receive a boost with passage of H.R. 2540, including more than 170,000 veterans rated 100 percent disabled who will get an additional \$767 each year added to their existing benefit.

I would note parenthetically in the State of New Jersey there are 3,246 disabled veterans with a rating of 100%, and they, too, will get an additional \$767 in benefits.

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Upon enactment of this legislation, all veterans or qualified survivors will

get the 2.7 percent COLA. The cost for this will be over \$400 million in the first year and \$543 million over the next 4 years. In all, the compensation package for the COLA will be \$2.5 billion over 5 years.

Another very important component of this bill addresses the lingering effects of service to Persian Gulf War veterans. Many veterans who applied for disability compensation for poorly defined illnesses found that a beneficial law we adopted in 1994, the Persian Gulf War Veterans Act, had a “Catch-22.” If a doctor could diagnose the illness, and the symptoms had not arisen in service or within 1 year, the claim was denied.

Mr. Speaker, there is an evolution occurring in medicine today with respect to so-called chronic multi-symptom illnesses. Some of these illnesses, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, have case definitions that are generally accepted in the medical profession, although their cause and effect and treatment are unknown. Concerned physicians who study and treat many patients with one or more symptoms may not agree that a given set of symptoms fit one case definition or another. At other times, physicians may decide to treat discrete symptoms without reaching a definitive diagnosis. This bill provides the expansion authority; and my good friend and colleague, the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. SIMPSON), the chairman of the Subcommittee on Benefits, will explain this momentarily in greater detail.

Let me also say that this legislation is the work of a tremendous amount of bipartisanship as well as a great deal of work by our respective staffs, and I would like to single out a number of Members. First of all, beginning with my good friend, the ranking member, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS), who was instrumental in working on section 2 of this important piece of legislation. He has contributed very constructively to the shaping of this bill.

I would especially like to thank the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. SIMPSON), as I mentioned before, chairman of the Subcommittee on Benefits, and the ranking member of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. REYES). I would just note that while the gentleman from Idaho is only in his second term and is already a subcommittee chairman, he is not new to policy making. Chairman SIMPSON is an accomplished lawmaker. As I think many of my colleagues know, he served in his State legislature for 14 years. His positions included majority caucus chairman, assistant majority leader in the Idaho House of Representatives; and he served as speaker, for 6 years in the Idaho House of Representatives. He is also a member of the Idaho Republican Party Hall of Fame. We are very fortunate to have him serving as chairman.

Let me also thank some of the other Members who worked on this. The gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS),